

Fed. Cafeteria

The Federal Diary

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GSA to Check Cafeteria Food, Service



By
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If you notice a picky customer in your cafeteria line in the next few weeks, the sort who brings his own doggy bag, he may be part of a team of gourmet-agents assigned to study Federal eating spots.

The General Services Administration is now wrestling with the problem of how to find out first hand why workers complain about food and services. One idea being considered is to send real people.—Federal men or outside food consultants like the Duncan Hines organization—to eat at and observe conditions in local Federal cafeterias.

Robert L. Kunzig, who runs Uncle Sam's housekeeping agency is credited with the food-check plan. He says GSA has been getting "many complaints concerning the food being served these days" in Federal buildings. Complaints range from quality to quantity of food, service and, of course, prices.

GSA's audit and investigations staff, headed by Ed Dwyer has been told to find out why people are complaining. It is now up to Dwyer's office to find out how it is going to find out why. There are several possibilities, including:

- Sending GSA employees to the cafeterias (who will pay for the test lunch hasn't been decided) to eat and report.
- Borrowing workers from other agencies, such as HEW, for the chore.
- Hiring an outside guide-to-good-eating firm to make the study, or, perhaps a combination of all three proposals.

GSA will limit its food study on the 46 cafeterias in the metropolitan area run by Government Services, Inc., a nonprofit group that operates them under contract to GSA.

Although some workers think GSI has been getting fat off their lunch money, president Robert Ayers says it has in fact been living up to its nonprofit name. Last year, for example, Ayers said GSI took in \$16.9 million in its food business. But labor costs were \$6.2 million, and after rents and maintenance were added to food costs, GSI wound up \$179,000 in the hole.

Ayers said GSI lost money in 1967, and the outlook for

this year is even less promising.

He says that prices in GSI-run cafeterias are, in general, about 20 per cent lower than in private cafeterias. GSI raised prices about 10 per cent last September, but private cafeterias have matched that increase.

The GSI president said that he must operate in any Federal building specified by GSA, whether or not it has enough volume (customers) to justify the outlay. GSI pays less rent than most private cafeterias (a percentage of the gross take) which is one reason it can charge less.

At the National Gallery of Art, for example, GSI runs a cafeteria open to the public and employees. Employees have a special line and pay less for the same food, according to Ayers.

Ayers said GSI hopes to get out of the red by streamlining its cafeterias to provide more self-service facilities. Hopefully, he said, this would avoid a price rise this year.

In addition, he'd like to do something to attract more customers. The number of employees eating in Government cafeterias has been declining, he said, while the Federal population here has been growing.

For what it's worth, partner Willard Clopton Jr. and I have been dining in Federal facilities for several months conducting our own survey. We've found a mixed bag, but generally the food—for what it costs—compares favorably with cafeterias on the outside.

We've noticed that the food and service in executive dining areas is, for some reason, much better than in the main cafeterias. Employees suspect that if the boss had to eat where they do, things would change.

The two best dining spots we've found in eating our way through Federal cafeterias are at the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (run by GSI) and at the Agriculture Department. Agriculture's cafeteria is run by the employee welfare association. We'll be happy to pass on comments on food service to GSA.

Direct Mail Advertising Association, which represents 2500 of the Nation's biggest users of the Post Office, has given a "qualified" endorsement to the plan to turn the Department into a Government-owned corporation. DMAA will offer several amendments to the administration bill when its spokesmen testify on postal reform July 25.